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Five Years of Netrunning

by Jens Kreutzer
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Five years ago, in March 1996, the conflict in Netspace between nefarious corporations and daredevil runners, before then only incarnated in novels, comic books, movies, and roleplaying games (notably **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.**), materialized itself as a collectible card game as well. While the background had appeal in itself to fans of the cyberpunk or science-fiction genre, and the artwork had a very "cool" flavor to it (no elves and orcs!), the game mechanics of **Netrunner®** were soon recognized as being among the best ever created in the world of collectible card games: INQUEST magazine awarded **Netrunner** the full score of 6 out of 6, a rating that had been unprecedented at the time. Even today (December 2000 issue, page 96), the INQUEST team is still grieving about **Netrunner**'s apparent demise. Although the game proved a smaller success commercially than envisioned by Wizards of the Coast, five years later, we're still here and playing, against all odds.

Five years is quite a long time in terms of CCGs; the granddaddy of them all, **Magic: The Gathering®**, is only eight years old itself, and countless other CCGs have more or less passed into oblivion in the meantime. That said, **Netrunner** might still see a rebirth (as an Emergency Self-Construct?), if Zvi Mowshowitz' deal with Wizards works out so that he can do a reprint on his own. His efforts are laudable indeed, and you can read for yourself what his plans are in the interview on page 5. Despite all the bad news we have had to endure in those five years, there have also been very good times, and I'd like to thank all the people who have dedicated their time and efforts to **Netrunner** (you know who you are), especially Jennifer Clarke Wilkes, who is still keeping the faith. To mark the occasion, I've put together all "Famous Netrunner Stacks" and "Netrunner Trivia" articles from previous issues of the TRQ to form a special issue which I dubbed "AI Advisor". It ended up 22 pages thick, and maybe would make a nice tournament prize if printed out and bound into a booklet. You can download it at the same website at which you found this *Top Runners' Quarterly*. As more "Famous Decks" and "Trivia" articles are being written for the TRQ, I will update the contents of "AI Advisor", so that checking it out from time to time might be worth your while. Please enjoy, and keep runnin' for the next five years as well!

Yours, Jens Kreutzer (TRQ Editor).

State of the Corp—March 2001

by Jennifer Clarke Wilkes
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A new year, a new century, a new millennium—and a new future for **Netrunner**. Spring is in the air, and renewed hope for the world's best trading card game is blooming along with it.

Three months ago, I had just about given up. The *Classic* expansion had been a failure, and **Netrunner** had no more chance of support from Wizards. But then a white knight (or should that be Green Knight?) came charging to the rescue from New York, and if all goes well Zvi Mowshowitz will bring this great game back with a bang. And what better time? The earth shakes in Seattle, and Netscape is trembling too.

I ran a tournament a month ago at a convention (ConSpiracy) in Mission, B.C. I was pleasantly surprised, not only to get participants, but that they came all the way from Victoria largely for this purpose! It's good to know that the players are still out there. And the fact that *Proteus* is nigh impossible to find suggests that people do buy the cards when they can.

So deepest thanks and best of luck to Zvi, and to all the people who are helping him make this dream come true.

Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

THE DIOSCURI (PART TWO)

Degenerate Corporate Investigators – DIOSCURI—Corp

At the start of each of your turns, put 2 Relaxation counters on Degenerate Corporate Investigators.
A: Add a number of bits to your bit pool equal to the number of Relaxation counters on Degenerate Corporate Investigators, and remove one Relaxation counter. You may use this ability only once per turn.
If the Runner makes a run, he or she may pay 1* to remove one Relaxation counter.

Starting Hand: 4
Starting Bits: 6

"But who investigates the investigators?"

Serbian Badman - DIOSCURI—Runner

A: Gain 5* and reveal cards from your stack until you reveal a piece of hardware. You may install this hardware immediately. Return any of the 5* not spent to the bank. Shuffle any revealed cards (including the hardware if uninstalled) back into your stack.
If the corp successfully trashes a piece of installed hardware, all other installed hardware is trashed as well.

"On the plus side, we own everything that anyone in our network owns. On the downside, if we lose the link ... pffft!"

"Elementary, My Dear Wilson!"
Famous Netrunner Stacks
#9: The World Would Swing If I Were King

by Jens Kreutzer
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Support by Frisco Del Rosario, Christophe Mambourg and Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

"Hey—if I score this, I win!"
– *Player getting a sneak preview of* Proteus™ *cards while running against one of the* ***Netrunner*** *game designers.*

With the *Proteus* expansion, Political Overthrow was dethroned as the most prestigious agenda in the Corp player's arsenal, and with it went the tacit law that said: A Corp has to score at least two agendas to win. Along came the mother of all agendas, pinnacle of Corporate ambition**—**World Domination, possibly the most sought-after card in the game of **Netrunner**. With a breath-taking difficulty of 12, World Domination takes five turns to be scored "by hand", but wins the game for the Corp in the selfsame instant with its yield of 7 agenda points. In contrast to this, the Runner would have to steal three World Dominations to win, since he or she only ever gets the 3 agenda points printed on the card.

When *Proteus* came out in 1996, World Domination was regarded with awe and eagerness, but initially people thought it impossible to build a viable deck with it, although the 3 agenda points on the card make for an excellent 6-in-45 deckbuilding ratio. More than a few thought that this card was meant to be a joke by the Wizards design team (which might indeed be true). Quite possibly surprising the designers, and most surely surprising the other players, Frisco Del Rosario wrote **Netrunner** history with his deck creation that came to be known as "The World Would Swing If I Were King" (after the song by Tom Petty). He got first place with it at the SiliCon **Netrunner** tournament held at Sunnyvale, California, in 1996.

Frisco won further fame when his deck was published in Wizards' now-defunct **The Duelist**® magazine. This article is based to a great extent on what was written in **Duelist** #18 (August 1997), as well as on what Frisco posted to the Netrunner-l mailing list on December 27, 1997. Somebody—probably Frisco himself—is reported to have said, "All I have to do is get 12 advancement counters on this card**—**what could be easier?"

So, how do you do it?

Well, not surprisingly, it comes down to fast-advancement cards that can speed this dreadnought-class agenda along a little bit. With one Overtime Incentives, three Project Consultants, and 40 bits, even World Domination (WD) can be scored out of hand. Accumulating that many bits while maintaining a reasonable defense against the Runner, however, is a daunting proposition. Therefore, the Corp starts off by aggressively advancing a WD right into the Runner's face early in the game, in a subfort with just superficial ice. If the agenda survives in the subfort for one turn, the ever-increasing number of advancement counters makes for good bluffing, since ambush nodes tend to accumulate counters in just the same way. If the Runner leaves WD alone long enough for the Corp to score it (either the slow way, or, more likely, with parts of the Overtime Incentives/Project Consultants combination which are affordable at the time), that is an ideal-case scenario.

Frisco's great achievement was that he found a way of turning the all-too-likely event of losing a partially-advanced WD (normally almost as bad in terms of wasted bits/actions as in terms of losing 3 agenda points to the Runner) into an advantage. Few people had ever given Silver Lining Recovery Protocol a second glance before, since it seems unwise to play with a card that has an effect only if the Corp loses an agenda (normally something the Corp would prevent at all costs), but it really excels when combined with World Domination. If a WD with five counters on it (i. e., it just has to "survive" one Runner turn) gets stolen, playing three Silver Linings in the following Corp turn yields an astonishing 45 bits. If there are seven counters, just two Silver Linings grant 42 bits, enough to pay for all four of the winning fast-advancement cards!

The following is a version of The World Would Swing that slightly differs from the one printed in **The Duelist**; it reflects two revisions Frisco made afterwards.

6	**World Domination**
3	**Project Consultants**
1	**Overtime Incentives**
3	**Silver Lining Recovery Protocol**
2	**Efficiency Experts**
6	**Accounts Receivable**
1	**Edgerunner, Inc., Temps**
1	**Euromarket Consortium**
1	**BBS Whispering Campaign**
1	**Virus Test Site**
2	**Red Herrings**
1	**Bizarre Encryption Scheme**
1	**Chester Mix**
1	**New Galveston City Grid**
1	**Rio de Janeiro City Grid**
2	**Quandary**
3	**Scramble**
3	**Crystal Wall**
2	**Data Wall 2.0**
4	**Shock.r**

The earlier version had an additional Edgerunner, Inc., Temps and one Credit Consolidation, which got

dumped for the sixth Accounts Receivable and the second Efficiency Experts, making bit-gaining somewhat more reliable. Since Silver Lining is intended for the endgame, bit-gainer operations and a BBS Whispering Campaign as a backup are included to pay for ice, advancement counters, and eventually fast-advancement operations. Having only three each of Project Consultants and Silver Lining (and only one Overtime Incentives!) seems a bit tight, but since the other cards are all very important, too, there is not much room for redundancy. Plus, too many Silver Linings tend to end up as dead weight. The Corp had better expect a long game or on-the-spot improvisations of the fast-advancement scheme, though.

Euromarket Consortium helps when HQ gets crammed and vital cards don't turn up fast enough; with its high trash cost, it can be installed in the open. The job of most of the rest of the cards is to defend the one agenda subfort. The ice is very cheap and saves on bits but was chosen to be comparatively hard on Codecracker, Skeleton Passkeys, and Jackhammer, icebreakers that were often encountered in tournaments at that time. Frisco mused about using Too Many Doors instead of Shock.r; the ice selection doesn't really matter that much as long it is cheap but cost-efficient. It seems like one could fare better with fewer walls in the mix, for example. Bizarre Encryption Scheme and Red Herrings, along with New Galveston, make things harder for the Runner and buy time for further advancement counters, whereas Chester Mix and Edgerunner help with installing deeper ice layers on the subfort as the game progresses (or, in the latter case, also quelling virus counters). Incidentally, the central data forts should normally get no more than one or two pieces of ice.

Rio de Janeiro could be nice in the late game (earlier, New Galveston is preferable), but Frisco himself remarked, "[V]ery few games are running long enough for Rio to be effective. For that reason, I'm considering swapping Rio out for another piece of ice or another Herrings." The BBS Whispering Campaign was intended to ease the way back to the 5-bit ceiling of Accounts Receivable—though the 2 bits per action are nice, it can use up a lot of actions better spent in other ways. There is nothing wrong with installing Whispering Campaign in the open, but Frisco said in his email that it best functions as a decoy installed in the iced subfort, although it then might end up blocking the space that should be used by World Dominations being advanced as fast as possible.

A final touch of devilish elegance completes the picture: Virus Test Site. The Corp wants the Runner to access this card from HQ or R&D to make him or her believe that its World Domination is an ambush, hopefully giving the subfort a wide berth afterwards. The one Net damage it does is perhaps trifling, but sometimes might nick a vital card, slowing down the Runner. If push comes to shove, the Corp might change its plans and actually install and advance Virus Test Site—if the Runner has no detection cards handy, this could be its only chance to win in some hopeless situations.

As far as tactics go in playing The World Would Swing, so much can be said: Never digress much from the primary goal of advancing WD. Everything else is secondary. A lot depends on bluffing the Runner: On the one hand, the Corp would like the Runner to hesitate out of fear of a Virus Test Site; on the other hand, it must keep the Runner in the dark about how many more turns are needed to score. To this end, all fast-advancement cards must be held back until they can win the game—there is no point in giving our intentions away early. Frisco advises: "The fun in this deck is learning all the bit/card combinations for Project Consultants and Overtime Incentives. For example, 8 bits plus Overtime puts the Corp in range when the agenda is advanced eight times (while the Runners sometimes don't fret until the ninth advancement counter is placed). Nineteen bits plus Overtime and Project Consultants wins when the agenda is advanced just five times (Overtime, three advancements, Consult)."

It must be admitted, however, that The World Would Swing might encounter some problems in top-level tournaments. First, it is always an all-or-nothing game, since the Corp either scores 7 agenda points or none, which doesn't sit well with the score sheet. Further, the deck doesn't have any strong defenses—most tournament-level Runner stacks have bit engines that let their breakers steamroll over ice like Crystal Wall. Even if the opponent shuns the subfort for fear of a Virus Test Site, a quickly-set-up R&D-attack strategy might outrun the Corp. Plus, considering the weak ice, the Corp is very vulnerable to virus stacks (though Edgerunner might come in handy), ice-destruction and bit-denial. In any case, a smart Runner will harrass HQ and R&D, stealing agenda and trashing upgrades, and run the subfort at the last possible moment.

But Frisco points out the strong points of the strategy as follows: "The deck is *exceptionally* fast. When fast advancement operations are not used to win the game—that is, when the first World Domination goes down and the Corporation merely advances it twelve times—the deck wins in seven or eight turns. Rob King once called it 'the ultimate speed deck'. One of the deck's points, after all, is that the Corporation only needs to draw, install, and advance one agenda—no need to draw, install, and advance two or three or four." This is a best-case scenario though, and when we assume that the Runner steals the first WD and that the second has to be fast-advanced, the speed level drops somewhat. The downside to the deck's legendary status is that Runners get suspicious much earlier nowadays when they see a card being advanced like crazy.

Therefore, if you manage the impossible and collect six World Dominations (Silver Lining Recovery Protocol is *much* easier to trade for), maybe you should still not risk getting beaten to a pulp at the next Constructed. But definetely try out this legend of a **Netrunner** deck at home

(where you can use proxies, too)! Once more in the words of Frisco: "This deck is just full of big moments—22 Net damage here, 81-bit Silver Lining Recoveries there, going from 0 agenda points to 7 in one turn."

That is not the end of the story, however. Recently, other decks have made themselves shown that are also based on six World Dominations. Frank Gerolstein has designed a deck that dispenses with ice altogether and uses TRAP! as a deterrent; it exploits Chicago Branch and Pacifica Regional AI for advancement and also features meat-damage cards. This makes for a diverse, promising cocktail. The other way of getting away with WD is using a Rio de Janeiro City Grid/Siren approach, in which agendas can be advanced in the open while the Runner has to deal with the Siren fort. Richard Cripe posted a deck of this kind to Netrunner-l on January 26, 2001. These strategies might be discussed in future installments of Famous **Netrunner** Stacks.

Some Personal Thoughts On *Dioscuri*

by Jens Kreutzer
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It's very good to see that at last, something is coming of the Dioscuri project, which had been in the pipeline for so long. Douglas and the other people involved deserve praise for giving us something new to play with! However, the six cards (four of which having been published here in the TRQ so far) as they stand now are "beta versions" for testing, further discussion, and tweaking. The present names of the cards are just working titles, too. Since this is a TRC project, everybody can have a say and tell the others what he or she thinks. Please do, either by mailing your comments to the Netrunner-l newsgroup or to me, for publication in the TRQ. For a start, I'll put down my personal comments.

So, let's see what we have so far. On the Corp side, we have "Psychic AI" and "Corp Investigators" (for short). The first has influencing dice rolls as its theme, a really fun idea that was completely absent in **Netrunner** until now. Obviously, this is mainly targeted at Bartmoss and Rio de Janeiro, but there are actually quite a few other cards around that may be affected. In Sealed play, random cards may play less of a role, but the ability to cash in the counters averts this Dioscuri's becoming useless.

The theme of the other Corp Dioscuri is less obvious; it seems mainly to be an alternative bit source (to discourage the omnipresent bit-gainer operations?), albeit one thinks of "money for nothing" here, since there is no real downside to it. The Runner being able to pay for removing the counters while on a run encourages running, which is a good thing (and maybe the idea behind this card?), but one has the feeling that this still is a bit unbalanced. After all, either way, it costs the Runner. More on that below.

The two Runner Dioscuri, "Fax Loop" and "Serbian Badman", focus on anti-fast-advancement and hardware, respectively, and it seems to me that they're doing a good job. The idea behind "Fax Loop" is so obviously welcome that it hardly needs commenting—slowing down those annoying speed Corp decks that tend to take the fun out of **Netrunner**. On the other hand, strategies using hardware have been losing out on good support cards so far. Though The Shell Traders etc. can be used with hardware also, they are not specifically aimed at hardware; in that area, the two ominous words Ronin Around about sum it up. With "Serbian Badman", even deck cards like Raven Microcyb Eagle might become playable, which has long been on the "stuff-we'd-like" list of many players.

All in all, I think the design concepts are interesting (with the possible exception of "Corp Investigators") and fun; maybe we're even going to get something with tracing in the last two Dioscuri? That would be cool as well. However, as things are now, there are two points I'd like to see altered. The first is balance. Take "Fax Loop": It has no downside whatsoever, apart from being useless if the Corp does not use fast advancement. Because of this, I have no reason not to play with "Fax Loop" in any of my future games. I think that every ability should come with a (small) downside as well, so that people cannot say, "Playing with this Dioscuri is always more advantageous than playing without it". Since "Fax Loop" ensures that the Runner will have a certain amount of time, no matter what strategy the Corp is using (if it isn't using fast advancement, then it is slow anyway, if not, it is slowed down by "Fax Loop"), I think something along the lines of "When starting the game, Runner forgoes his or her next action." to be appropriate. As for the starting cards and bits (which only appear on the Corp side?), I'm not so sure how it works out. This is of course borrowed from the **Magic** *Vanguard* cards that inspired Dioscuri, but starting bits and cards seem not that important in **Netrunner** as starting life and cards are in **Magic**, since in **Netrunner**, you can always get either simply by spending actions. Maybe it would be elegant to make do without them. For "Corp Investigators", I could imagine "The cost of playing or rezzing Transaction cards is increased by 1 bit.", and for "Psychic AI"—well, it's not that powerful—maybe, to prevent Rio abuse, "You cannot have more than one rezzed Region in play. If you have more than one rezzed Region in play, trash all but one." But any small inconvenience would do.

The second point concerns the Dioscuri working names. I know that they're just working titles, but I'm not particularly impressed. Remember the discussion on "Consortiums" and "Mentors"? That is the way to go in my opinion. Let's choose a Corp name from **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.** for the Corp Dioscuri and a famous Runner name for the Runner Dioscuri. In that way, players can identify with something when playing the cards. I can't identify with a fax loop too well, for example. My suggestion: Rache Bartmoss for "Fax Loop" (we can keep the quote, that's just his style), Spider Murphy for "Serbian Badman" (we'll think of a quote), Netwatch (they own the 'Net and write the rules for

it) or Merril, Asukaga & Finch (info brokers) for "Psychic AI" and—hmm, I don't really know about "Corp Investigators". What do other people think?

The French Nationals 2000

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This article is an abridged version of the online article by Jérôme Christen that originally appeared on
http://www.gameimpact.com/Default.asp?MODULE=DOSSIERS&TARGET=DETAIL&ID=3

The French **Netrunner** nationals took place in Paris on November 25 and 26, 2000. What could have been a rainy, uneventful autumn weekend soon took a much more nervous pace, with its fair share of plot twists. A testimony of **Netrunner**'s enduring popularity was evidenced by the two dozen players that showed up for the tournament. Some famous active players were missing, however, most noticeably the Black Ops team, who were busy finishing the next issue of their magazine.

The main event was divided into three parts: a sealed-deck tournament using one *Proteus* booster and two *Classic™* boosters, then a competition using the 1/15 format, which is ever so popular in France, and finally a Restricted tournament. The sealed-deck portion of the tournament occupied the whole of Saturday until 8:00 P.M. and offered a bumpy ride to everyone, gameplay-wise. Sealed deck favors those players with a good deal of practice under their belts, along with a solid knowledge of the cards and their combinations, a reliable memory and a splash of luck. After this explanation, my last-place showing still puzzles me.

Sunday morning saw the players compete in the 1/15 tournament. A good part of the night had been spent tuning decks, and the neighboring drugstore was fresh out of Lucidrine™, so the players had to rely on quite a few cups of coffee to focus their minds. The 1/15 rules allow every **Netrunner** card in a deck but place a limit on the number of copies of a given card: One copy is allowed for every 15 cards in the deck. Practically, this means that every deck may contain up to three copies of a given card, since almost all the players stick to the 45-card lower limit. A remarkable exception was Frédéric Garnier's monumental 120-card (8 x 15) deck. It was a nasty killer Corp, but according to its creator's own words, "it invariably loses one agenda in its first turn". Since I've been able to steal the one and only Political Overthrow from his full HQ in my first turn, I can't say I disagree with him.

Some players were not able to attend on Sunday, but newcomers arrived to fill the gaps. Sleep hours had been scarce, but the competition had to go on, and everyone wanted to improve the scores of the day before. Mind you, at least for me, that wasn't an overwhelming task. At the end of the 1/15 tournament, the Top 3 players for the 2000 champion title were Florent Jeudon, Yannick Mescam, and Gabriel Burkhard. Several competitors were very close, and the last round (Restricted constructed) promised to offer a tight race.

The most commonly used Runner stack was based on the Priority Wreck/Synchronized Attack on HQ combo. Some TagMe stacks were also spotted. Rent-I-Con was by far the most popular icebreaker, and the Runners seemed to favor the use of preps to meet their financial needs. On the Corp side, Corporate War and City Surveillance infested the decks, but a handful of wall decks and URL decks also made an appearance. A notable event was the catastrophic performance of Yannick Mescam, who desperately saw his place in the Top 3 slip from his grasp. Playing Edited Shipping Manifests on a broke Corp doesn't help boost the finances of the Runner, and judging from the cries I've heard during the round, it happened more than once. Maybe the pressure had grown too high.

Finally, around 7:30 P.M., the anxiously-awaited final rankings were proclaimed:

1. Florent Jeudon
2. Olivier Flament
3. Gabriel Burkhard

Congratulations to the new French champion! You can find more info on Netrunner France at:
http://www.multimania.com/netrunnerfrance

Interview: Zvi Mowshowitz on the Future of Netrunner

by Jens Kreutzer, with Douglas Kaufman
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Zvi, for a couple of months, you have been hosting an alternate ***Netrunner*** *discussion list on* **Yahoo!**, *which you use to get input from other* ***Netrunner*** *players about how to best bring about a revival of our favorite game—namely, getting the printing press to run again. Could you perhaps sum up once more what exactly your plans for the future are?*

My plan for the future is to revive **Netrunner** as a full-fledged CCG. The first project will probably be an expansion, designed to be a good companion to the basic set for Sealed-Deck and to shake up Constructed. At the same time, I'll implement the other fixes necessary to solve Constructed's problems and to lay the groundwork for future templating and ideas. It's also very possible that there will be preconstructed decks, which may take cards from anywhere.

Like any CCG, **Netrunner** has game balance problems and interactions that don't work properly. It's probably one of those with the smallest such problems, but they still need to be fixed. Look at the standard tournament format: It's amazing to think that a game can be healthy with virtually no restrictions on what players can play. After fixing a few additional cards, it looks like the only restrictions on deck construction we'll need are the 45 card minimum and the Corporation agenda requirement. On the other hand, it may also be advantageous to remove cards that were too powerful, to improve game balance when a revised basic set is reprinted at some point. There would be more expansions, assuming the game did well enough to finance them.

The other major missions from a design perspective are to find a way if possible for **Netrunner** to function as a multiplayer game or as a game where both sides can bring the same deck, and possibly to build a fully functional computer version. Work has

already begun on the computer version (it will at least be a huge help in playtesting and tournaments like World Domination, which had to be played over IRC last time) and on possible multiplayer rules. If the multiplayer game proves good enough, there could even be a multiplayer expansion, which for now I'm codenaming Corporate War. All of this of course combines with the problems of advertising, distribution and all the other issues dealing with selling a CCG. I know much less about that end, so I'm still learning.

It all seems to be a bit like the knight in shining armor who comes to the rescue—like in a fairytale. If you pull this off, everybody involved will probably be as happy as the happy end in a fairytale, accordingly. It is only the more astounding since you haven't been that present in the **Netrunner** *scene in the past. Could you maybe tell our readers something about yourself?*

I'm 22, currently a senior at Columbia University. I've been a professional **Magic: The Gathering** player for a few years, and I've always thought I'd join WotC's R&D someday. The layoffs, however, were a clear message that I would be graduating at the wrong time for that. I used to play **Netrunner** at Neutral Ground, where we had a local group that included *Sideboard* **Netrunner** writer Matt Blank and World Domination runner-up Rick Cripe. The game held on strong in New York until WotC decided to stop printing expansions, at which point things wound down, without any hope of new cards or, because of that, for new players.

The other day, I read a ***Magic***® *article on the WotC webpage that was written by you, and a couple of years ago, I even heard of a "Zvi deck" that was very famous in the* **Magic** *community. (That* was *you, wasn't it?) All of this adds up to the impression that you must be quite a successful and experienced* ***Magic*** *player. How come you're now giving that much effort to revive a game that has been called "dead" all too often?*

I would consider myself one of the more successful professional **Magic** players, in the top 20 in lifetime earnings and designer of many of **Magic**'s top decks. I also write on a regular basis for both WotC itself (at `www.sideboard.com`) and for Mindripper (at `magic.mindripper.com`). Together, the writing, deckbuilding and doing well have made me one of the most well-known **Magic** players. But the truth is, no matter how much work a player may want to do preparing for **Magic** tournaments (and often it seems like there aren't enough hours in the day for it), there will be long stretches of time both in the day and in the year when there's little productive to do. With so much free time, it makes sense to try and find a second job. I loved **Netrunner** from the point when I learned how to play to the point when I stopped playing because there were only three of us left in New York. The deck you heard about was probably my old Dream Halls-based deck called TurboZvi, which was really cool, but a description of it would be beyond what probably should be the scope of this interview.

As for why I'm doing so much to revive **Netrunner**, there are several reasons. One is that it allows me to get training in game design without working directly for WotC, which would prevent me from participating in future Pro Tours. Another is that **Netrunner** is still the best CCG out there, and definitely didn't deserve the fate it received the first time around. A third is that the game is an amazing opportunity—there's a ton of people who don't play anymore but still remember that it was a great game, and Wizards has already dealt with most of the game's fixed costs. A fourth is that I have a high-enough profile to make the **Magic** community wake up and look at the game again when it does come back. A fifth is that I have the reputation with Wizards to pull off the deal and took the initiative to do it. If not me, then who?

And the game is only dead because WotC doesn't have the time to bother with what it considers small potatoes. **Netrunner** would have been a success for anyone else. If I can just win back a substantial portion of its previous player base, that alone would be enough to pay for the game's continued life through as many expansions as it has in it. Wizards really does "print money," and when overprinting that money caused inflation, they bailed on us. Shame on them.

How did you start playing ***Netrunner****, and why did you think it was attractive?*

I started playing **Netrunner** back when the game was first released. I forget who taught me the game, but it might well have been Rick Cripe. **Netrunner** has a lot of features I really like. One is the things you can do without any cards. **Magic** games are often decided by mana screw or bad draws. In **Netrunner**, bad draws of course still happen, but they only force players to spend time drawing cards or to get their bits less efficiently. There's still a game to be played. There's a ton more skill in **Netrunner** play than **Magic** for the most part. There are players I can beat consistently from both sides with the same two sealed decks, and two players I know of that can do the same back to me. The mathematical aspect of the game is really attractive to me. The structure of the game lets players do almost anything for a price—the Runner can do anything he wants if he has the bits to, and by implication, the actions. The Corporation's cards can do just about anything for a price except search.

Let's talk about your project once again. You seem to go about it in a very professional way—how did you approach Wizards and actually get somebody to listen to you?

Believe it or not, I basically just came out and asked. I didn't think there was a very good chance WotC would agree, but after the layoffs and the announcement that they were getting rid of all their CCGs except **Pokémon**® and **Magic**, I figured there was no harm in asking the question. So I wrote a very polite formal e-mail introducing myself and noting my background and asking whether they would be willing to sell **Netrunner**. I got back a Yes, and the rest was just logically following up as I figured things out as I went along.

Since we're dealing with a company here, I guess it's all a league of its own as far as finances are concerned. Without being specific, what are the general costs of a project like this?

The costs are significant, but actually less than the number I was hoping for when I first asked. It's not the kind of thing a random player can just decide to go out and do, but it's not an unusually rough business to gain entry to in terms of startup costs. In addition, having a lot of the fixed costs already paid for by WotC is a huge help.

Would you get permission to use all original artwork as well? If you did a reprint of old cards, would they look exactly the same as before (apart from errata that would probably be implemented)?

Old cards would look virtually the same as before except where they're changed, and obviously that will be kept to a minimum unless it's decided that many of them should get better. The decision to weaken the "mistake" cards by changing numbers and make the changes retroactive in **Battletech**® outright killed the game, and I'm not about to repeat that. If the numbers change on any cards, it will be for the better if there's any choice in the matter. The art will stay the same, assuming the artists give their permission (if the contracts have expired; WotC is looking into that), but that shouldn't be a problem.

What's R. Talsorian's stance in the current discussion?

R. Talsorian is more than happy to go along with the deal. A revived **Netrunner** can only help them, and they're taking no risk.

If you had complete control and no input from anyone else, what would you release first?

Well, it's too late for that, I already have a good deal of input. If I didn't, I wouldn't feel comfortable releasing anything but a new version of the basic set. Instead, I've already gotten several views of Constructed and what needs to be printed, and I hope to see more. I also have at least one expansion to draw from.

*Have you thought about rereleasing **Netrunner** as a non-CCG game? It is conceivable, after all, to market it as a basic set with set contents, and then offer "expansion packs" with set contents as well (such as a set called "Walls", with Data Masons, Superior Net Barriers, etc., and all walls that weren't in the basic set, for example). In Germany, a card game called* Die Siedler *(*The Settlers of Catan*) has tried this and turned into a big hit. Since there is no card limit in **Netrunner**, people would probably buy multiples of those sets anyway, but had control over what they got. Trading would still be possible. And—there could be special "tournament" packs sorted randomly and specifically tailored for the needs of Sealed or booster draft tournaments. This would eliminate the single most common argument I've heard from people who tried **Netrunner**, found it great, and then didn't take it up: "I can't afford another money-sink CCG in addition to **Magic**." Any comments on this? (This idea comes from Daniel Schneider originally.)*

That's the nightmare scenario: **Netrunner** fails as a CCG, so instead it's issued in non-collectible form. I think the game is actually good enough to be worth playing strictly as a game, especially if the decks are predesigned and balanced for maximum play value. But it's much better and richer (and more profitable) to publish it as a CCG. As for the complaint that "I can't afford another CCG right now," I agree that this is a concern for many players, but to them I say they should simply play limited or other future formats that don't require the investment of true unlimited Constructed. **Netrunner** is by far the best sealed-deck game in existence. If a player gets enough cards from their sealed decks to move on to constructed, so much the better. But selling sets is basically admitting defeat.

The Settlers as I understand it plays from a common deck in a multiplayer setting. That's a whole different type of card game. The best parallel for this situation would be **Illuminati: New World Order**. That was an interesting but horribly broken game, so much so that I was able to create a deck that wins almost every game on turn two (die rolls are involved, I have to not roll multiple 11s or 12s on 2d6) using only the **One With Everything** box. Still, playing that game with common decks is great fun if you strip the bad cards out and just play with the strong half of the set. Otherwise the bad cards just sit around doing nothing. Finally, because I'm trying to get into a designer's frame, of course there wouldn't be expansions with subjects like "big walls," because that implies the game is still being played primarily in Constructed format.

The Settlers *as a card game plays one-on-one just like **Netrunner**, but I agree that a CCG is preferable as long as it is viable. Have you looked at other people's "virtual expansions"? Did you like any of them?*

I've only looked at one, Neal's expansion Dangerous Allies, which is owned by WotC and which I therefore will own when I get the game itself. There's a very simple reason for this: I don't want my head filled with great ideas that I can't use because they're not mine. I keep hearing great things about R.I.P, but I keep telling everyone not to tell me about anything in it. If the designers are willing to grant me the rights, I will gladly take a look at other people's virtual expansions. There are certain cards that will have to be printed to fix specific problems and I'll handle those, but beyond that I'm sure that I'm not the only one coming up with good ideas.

As for the one I have seen, Dangerous Allies is a very interesting expansion with a lot of good concepts in it. I wouldn't publish it as it stands right now, but given some development I think the set would be a worthy addition to the game. I strongly suspect that by the time I have to fill out the slots in the first expansion that aren't for dedicated metagame fixes, I'll be swamped with cards I want to print.

Anyone working with you behind the scenes?

I have my discussion group, at the group NetrunnerRnD; for those interested, the URL is `http://groups.yahoo.com/group/NetrunnerRnD`, and anyone who wants to can join in. Alan Comer is helping to produce a possible computerized version, and I can't thank Jennifer Clarke Wilkes enough for her help. There are many others already helping out as well.

*Apart from **Magic** and **Netrunner**, do you play other CCGs (or RPGs)? What are your favorites?*

I used to play **AD&D®**, but my group fell apart and I haven't played in years. At various times I was into a bunch of different CCGs. I played **Jyhad**™ in a league, back when it was still called **Jyhad**, but even with 200 cards per person before trading, we still broke that game into pieces. I played **Battletech** for a while, and I really liked that game. I even made it to the Top 8 of the 1998 **Battletech** worlds, but shortly after that they changed the game's look and what many of the cards do and the game flat-out died on the spot. That was a shame, and if I succeed with **Netrunner**, I might look into that game again.

I played **Babylon 5™** with a group of friends for a few months, but it wasn't very consumer-friendly, and only the fact that it was multiplayer and that our group was friendly kept it balanced at all. It was probably the best game made by designers with absolutely no clue about how to run a game. When my cards got stolen along with my **Magic** collection, I didn't feel like spending enough money to get back in. I've also played both of Decipher's

games, **Star Trek®** and **Star Wars®**, but right now I don't play anything but **Netrunner** and **Magic**.

Sounds rather familiar to me (apart from the stolen cards, knock on wood). Is there anything you'd like to say to the ***Netrunner*** *community as a whole?*

If everything goes well over the next few months, the future of this game will be in my hands and in the hands of the **Netrunner** community. When the time comes, it will be vital that we spread the word and help get people to try the game again. Until then, it's important that I get as much information as possible on all fronts to help me make the decisions that will shape the game. In your experience, what's dominant in Constructed and why? What would be dominant in a format where card access isn't an issue? Who has the edge in Sealed and why? What kind of Sealed and Constructed do you play? What problems does the game need to fix? Then there are the practical questions. What's the **Netrunner** situation in your area? How many boxes could I expect to sell in total in your area, so I know what size print run to use? What size should the expansions and basic set be? What would be determining factors in getting new players or getting back or keeping old ones? What new cards are you dying to see in print that you've come up with?

The best place to give feedback on these questions would be the Yahoo! *discussion group mentioned above. Zvi, thank you very much indeed for your time, and even more for your efforts to save* ***Netrunner****!*

Did You Know?

Bits and Pieces from the NR Trivia Collection

#9: Banpei

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with support by Nils Kreutzer and Daniel Schneider

Banpei is perhaps the most basic and typical of all sentry ice cards in the Corp's arsenal. Because of its two "must-break" subroutines and its very reasonable rez cost, it is sometimes seen in Constructed play, and most players would use it in Sealed. Still, most sentry (and generic) icebreakers don't pay a lot to break through Banpei, although it seems to be the perfect foil for Big Frackin' Gun or Black Dahlia. Wild Card, of course, is a different story altogether.

The illustration on Banpei depicts a computerized, futuristic samurai in what seems to be a virtual hallway, standing guard. The warrior carries a sword strapped across his back, and his helmet has a shape typical of the Japanese *kabuto*. Incidentally, the original picture created by Douglas Shuler is only reproduced in part: On the cover of the **Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.** supplement *Bartmoss' Brainware Blowout*, the whole illustration is depicted, showing *another*, similar samurai standing to the left of the one seen on the card.

Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0., published by R. Talsorian Games, is the roleplaying game from which the background of the **Netrunner** world was adapted. In the section on Netrunning in the **Cyberpunk** second edition basic rulebook (p. 139), an offensive program named "Killer" is mentioned, which is used to destroy other programs. Employed as a defense for dataforts as well as by Netrunners themselves, it comes in several strengths, just called "Killer II", "Killer IV", and so on, up to "Killer VI". Without doubt, this category of programs (which all do the same but have six different levels of strength in game terms) served as the model for Banpei, Ice Pick Willie, D'Arc Knight, Triggerman, Sentinels Prime, and Data Naga.

In the description of the icon (Netspace representation) that is characteristic of the "Killer" series, we find a "large manlike robot, dressed as a metallic samurai. His eyes glow red from behind his mask, and he carries a glowing katana"—*et voilà* the Banpei illustration.

In the background as well as on the samurai's chest armor, one can see a stylized trefoil symbol, which is the corporate logo of Arasaka Corporation, based in Japan. This leaves no doubt about the Killer's affiliation. The red circle symbol divided into two drop-like halves with a white dot in them (seen right next to the samurai's elbow, and, by the way, on Loan From Chiba) is an ancient Asian symbol for Yin and Yang, two opposing forces representing the cosmos in Eastern philosophy, which are ideally in an equilibrium.

It is not too far-fetched to associate Yin and Yang with Bushido, the Way of the Warrior, which has its roots in Zen Buddhism and is mentioned in the card's flavor text. Bushido was a set of principles (theoretically) to be obeyed by the ideal warrior, among them absolute loyalty to one's lord, readiness to accept death in battle (or indeed at any given moment in life), and purity of mind. The quote, "The survival of Bushido into cyberspace has spiritual significance to many execs", finds its sequel in the flavor text of Wild Card, forming a nice connection between Banpei and its nemesis, thereby contrasting the Corporate philosophy of Bushido (yeah, right) with the Runner's more anarchistic approach.

Considering all of the above, the name "Banpei" couldn't be more fitting. As you might have guessed, *banpei* (pronounced [bahm-peh]) is Japanese. Written with the Chinese characters for "guard" (*ban*) and "soldier" (*hei*, which becomes *pei* in this phonetic environment), Banpei means just—"sentry".

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